

Starting Off 2014 With A Win!

The Farm Bill includes a number of provisions that are very important to the Hardwood industry, and it is with great pleasure that we report that after 2 long years of advocacy and negotiations, a five-year Farm Bill was indeed signed by President Obama on February 7, 2014.

The Hardwood Federation has been a vocal proponent for five-year authorization and focused much of our time and energy on communicating this priority to Members of Congress and the Administration. The bill offers long term certainty to vital programming and important codification of environmental best practices that have been continually challenged in the courts.

The Bill includes full authorized annual funding of \$200 million for Market Access Program (MAP) and \$34.5 million for Foreign Market Development program (FMD) through 2018, two programs of vital importance to the Hardwood industry. The Hardwood Federation's attention now turns to making sure these dollars start flowing to the American Hardwood Export Council in an efficient and expeditious manner.

Compromise language in the Farm Bill provides forest landowners with a comfortable level of regulatory certainty that forest roads will be considered non-point sources of pollution and that harvesting operations will not require costly and burdensome point source water quality permits.

The new Bill also clarifies that forest products are eligible for the USDA's Bio-based Labeling and Procurement program and provides \$3 million per year to implement the program. In addition, there is some very positive green building language in another section of the measure that encourages research on wood as a green building material. This research will be conducted by the Forest Products Laboratory.

A number of important forestry provisions were also folded into the bill, including expanding the Good Neighbor Authority to all 50 states, allowing for better coordination between federal and state officials in promoting healthy state forests; permanently authorizing Stewardship Contracting on federal lands; and designating treatment areas (as part of an insect and disease treatment program) in at least one National forest in each state. This program would also be applied on a landscape scale and treatment areas would enjoy categorical exclusions from NEPA as long as they are less than 3,000 acres and comply with some other conditions.

Renewable energy programs supporting thermal energy from biomass were also reauthorized and provided mandatory funding by the Farm Bill. Fifty million dollars in mandatory funding each year were included for the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) which helps finance efficiency upgrades for biomass boilers and \$15 million was allocated for The Bio-energy Program for Advanced Bio-fuels which provides direct payments to advanced bio-fuel producers, including pellets and sawdust.

The Farm Bill is a massive piece of legislation that touches countless sectors of the U.S. economy. As with any bill this size, there are winners and losers. This time the hardwood industry comes out on the winning side. The dedication of industry members, the hundreds of phone calls, letters, e-mails and meetings made a difference in the end. Thank you to everyone that made this victory possible.